Vocabulary at St Nicholas

Building language for success

Using core and exposure vocabulary, alongside tiered vocabulary, helps your child access the curriculum, deepen their understanding and build the language they need for the future.

What is core and exposure vocabulary?

Core vocabulary consists of the key subject-specific words that are explicitly taught as part of the topic in that subject. These are the most important words children need to know, understand and use with confidence. They are taught, practised and revisited in lessons so children can build deep subject knowledge.

Exposure vocabulary includes words children encounter regularly in everyday language, across different subjects and in the wider world. These words are not always taught directly, but children hear, see, read and use them often, helping to develop their vocabulary, comprehension and confidence.

What is tiered vocabulary?

Tiered vocabulary groups words by their frequency, complexity and use.

- **Tier 1** – everyday words (e.g. dog, run, happy).
- **Tier 2** – academic words used across a range of subjects (e.g. compare, classify, explain).
- **Tier 3** – subject-specific words (e.g. photosynthesis, fraction, parliament).

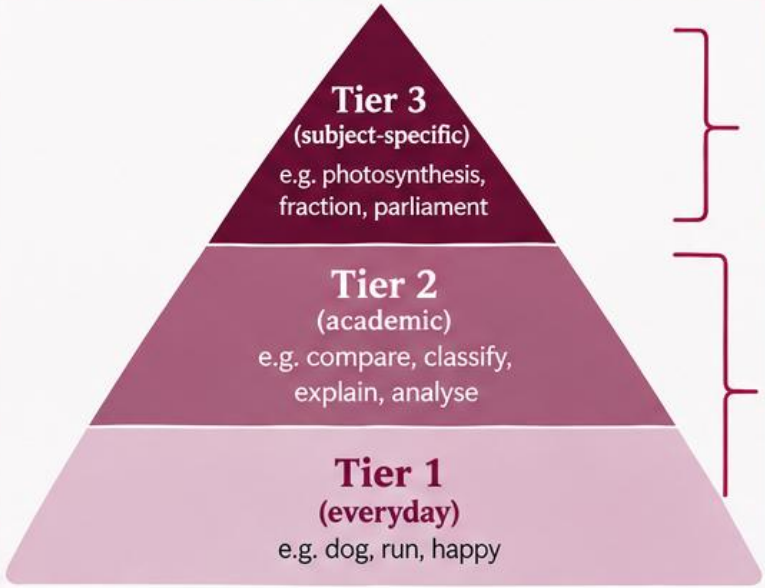
How does this link to the English National Curriculum?

The curriculum expects schools to teach a rich vocabulary so that children can read, write, speak and understand across all subjects. In our approach, exposure vocabulary develops broad language knowledge through frequent encounters with Tier 1 and Tier 2 words, while core vocabulary focuses on the Tier 3 words (subject-specific) that need to be explicitly taught within a topic.

How does this work in our school?

Each subject has its own core vocabulary for each topic. Teachers explicitly teach and revisit these Tier 3 words so children develop secure subject knowledge. Alongside this, children are continually exposed to Tier 1 and Tier 2 vocabulary through classroom talk, reading, writing and learning across the curriculum.

How Tiered Vocabulary Relates to Core and Exposure Vocabulary



CORE VOCABULARY

This is Tier 3 (subject-specific) vocabulary and is explicitly taught as part of the topic in that subject. Children learn, practise and use these words in their lessons.

EXPOSURE VOCABULARY

This is Tier 1 and Tier 2 vocabulary that children encounter regularly in everyday language and across different subjects.

Some Tier 2 vocabulary may also be **core** (e.g. rigour, analyse, evaluate) when it is explicitly taught as part of a topic in a subject.

Where tiered vocabulary fits in

Core vocabulary is primarily Tier **3**: the subject-specific language we **explicitly teach** and expect children to master as part of the topic.

Exposure vocabulary is mainly Tier 1 and Tier 2: language children encounter and use regularly across school and everyday life.

In each subject

Every subject has its own core vocabulary for each topic. For example, in Science, core vocabulary might include photosynthesis and ecosystem, while children are exposed to Tier 1 and Tier 2 words such as observe, compare, identify and describe.

"Vocabulary progression is demonstrated not simply through introducing increasingly difficult words, but through moving selected vocabulary from exposure to secure, independent use."